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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses three considerations for curriculum change: a definition of curriculum which considers learning environments, a set of premises to assist in curriculum planning, and suggested curricular priorities. The first section discusses various dimensions of curriculum, including expressed, implied, and emergent (described in more detail in SO 011 675). The second section identifies premises which can help curriculum developers identify priorities: 1) the social system of the school discourages change, 2) teacher interactions with learners are influenced by unnecessary regularities, 3) monolithic school environments discriminate against students who differ from the majority, 4) marginal students as well as marginal teachers can provide important information on curriculum improvement, 5) cooperation between parents and teachers affects the attitudes of pupils toward learning, 6) the principal is a key leader for initiating curriculum change, and 7) the teacher must ultimately decide how curriculum improvements are put into practice. The third section discusses priorities for curriculum change. Suggested priorities include educational change at the state and national levels, research to determine positive effects of the school environment, analysis of relationships between students and teachers, creation of multiple-environment schools, and development of instruments for measuring student perceptions. (KC)

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VIEWS FROM THE MARGINS: PRACTICAL PREMISES AND MODEST PRIORITIES FOR CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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Views from the Margins: Practical Premises and Modest Priorities for Curriculum Improvement

Curriculum reforms of the past decade were filled with promise and potential; some materialized but many went hollow when it came to results.[1] Experience shows us that reforms seem to crystallize by interlocking with the "system" of the school, and the original coherence and substance they once possessed is absorbed by layer upon layer of revision. The wizardry of the ongoing nature of the school wins out over the substance of the reforms and the will of the reformers. Witness, for example, that the roars of educators who called for curriculum changes during the 1960's and early 1970's are now softened to mere whispers by the persistent organizational structure and "ways of doing things" that too often permeate our educational institutions.

Further, educators who actually work in schools and classrooms to implement curriculum changes know how easy it is to wind-up on the margins—alienated and disconnected from the very settings they desire to improve. It is odd. Many of the same conditions that force students to the margins and hinder their learning also place on the fringes those educators who seriously challenge the existing state of order. The dynamics of marginality are made even more perplexing when the curriculum reforms that were being attempted, but never took hold, are advanced as reasons for the present weaknesses of our schools. In this trig fashion, attention is directed away from continuing practices that perpetuate what already exists. The conditions that force students and educators alike to the margins become camouflaged, and prevailing environments in schools and classrooms are not considered as starting points for improving curriculum.

We believe it is time to attend to the miliue of the school. In this paper, curriculum research and practice are considered from a broader, environmentalist perspective. We work from a perspective consisting mostly of views from the margins. By identifying with these views, we try to tap the desire and consciousness that is so necessary for constructive change. Also, by attending to the margins we are less likely to become bound by a way of thinking that simply accepts regularities of schooling as necessities for education.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, we advocate a definition of curriculum as environments for learning. Second, a set of premises are stated to assist in the formulation of future curriculum priorities. Finally, each premise is elaborated and emerging priorities are suggested. These priorities indicate, in part, what we believe are necessary directions for researching the complex character of learning environments, understanding how the school and classroom context can be improved, and implementing changes that will increase compatibility between the curriculum and the people who live and learn in the school environment.

CURRICULUM AS ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING

Commonly, educational environments are evaluated or researched as if they consisted of discrete treatment variables (methods, materials, procedures, classroom organizational patterns) that are designed to produce specifically desired results (increased achievement, attendance, attitudes) with the greatest efficiency and economy. This input-environment-output model assumes that purpose precedes and continuously defines activity. According to this way of thinking, goals are formulated

and made precise; specific treatment activities to achieve these purposes are designed and implemented; and the relative attainment of purposes is evaluated. A treatment is considered successful if those who receive it score higher than those who do not—other things being equal. Applied to efforts to reform curriculum, the input-environment-output approach leads to an overreliance on linear, Research Development and Diffusion strategies or accountability plans.[2] Curriculum changes, based on this model, result in the adoption of a pre-planned program or treatment shown to have been effective in some remote situation.

As Goodlad notes, the more sharply defined the enterprise or activity, and the more readily it can be separated or observed in isolation from other phenomena, the more useful the input-environment-output model and its many relatives will be as a guide to curriculum practice.[3] However, efforts at curriculum change based on this input-output perspective of environment typically falter on several serious shortcomings of the model. A brief summary of these shortcomings is necessary before a more comprehensive meaning of environment is advanced to guide curriculum practice.

First, educational situations are characterized by numerous relevant parameters, presenting too many interacting variables to enable the effects of discrete treatments to be realistically assessed. Second, as Pace puts it, another vice of the input-output model is that it makes some obvious environmental influences impossible to demonstrate, particularly in situations where the relationship between input variables (like high SAT scores) and output variables (like high GRE scores) are

highly correlated and can lead to the statistically logical conclusion that even the concentrated impact of a college environment like Yale's really did not affect the scholastic potential of its students. For the environmental impact to be demonstrated, the lowest scores on the SAT would have to become the highest scores on the GRE, and vice versa.[4] Third, curriculum evaluation designs assume that innovatory programs undergo little or no change after implementation begins. In practice, the opposite is usually true. Few curriculum innovations introduced into a school environment are ever implemented as conceived and most undergo constant revision. If this is so, the discrete impact of environmental treatments is blurred, and a more fruitful line of inquiry would probe the relationship between the innovation and the rest of the environment, rather than the relationship between the innovation and the outcome variables. Finally, the input-output approach limits our view of environment to one dimension—the intended or expressed purpose—and reduces the scope of curriculum to its influences on quantitative outcome data gathered by objective means. This reductionist tendency discourages the collection of the concerns or questions of participants, and is ultimately suitable for hierarchical organizations where curriculum programs and practices can be decided externally.

A narrow, one-dimensional regard for educational environment has resulted from an over-extension of the input-environment-output research and evaluation model. Instead, a broader vision of educational environment is needed to facilitate curriculum improvement in the practical realities of schools. To this end, we advance the following view of educational environments, and define curriculum in this environmental context.

Learning environments consist of a variety of intellectual, social and physical conditions and happenings that influence individual behavior. Simply stated, the learner is exposed to a network of forces that interact in complicated ways to produce, in each classroom and school, a unique pattern of circumstances. Analyzing the role of environment in selecting and shaping behavior, many writers have defined environment as a powerful determinant.

The environment, is recognized as a complex system of situational determinants that exert an influence upon participating individuals. These forces may be factors of social, physical, and intellectual significance. Anastasi, in an analysis of the role of environment in behavior, defines such determinants as direct influences resulting in behavioral change.[5] Bayley,[6] Bloom,[7] Pace,[8] Stern,[9] and others also view environment as a powerful determinant of behavior. Bloom characterizes environment as follows:

> We regard the environment as a network of forces and factors which surround, engulf, and play upon the individual. Although some individuals may resist this network, it will only be the extreme and rare individuals who can completely avoid or escape from these forces. The environment is a shaping and reinforcing force which acts upon the individual.[10]

The conceptualization of environment used in the present paper is based upon the assumption that behavior is a function of the transactional relationship between the individual and his or her environment. As Dewey describes, learning is dependent on experience.[11] He further suggests that the nature and quality of educational experiences are largely determined by the characteristics of the learners' environment. Many theories of behavior support the feasibility of

this assumption, as do a series of studies in methodological assessment of personality by Stern, Stein, and Bloom.[12] By viewing the environment in terms of those aspects which are significant for the determination of behavior, it is possible to extract and classify important portions of the environment in which the individual lives. Murray suggests that if an individual believes that a portion of the environment signifies a certain thing, it will be this perception that will determine his or her behavior. In other words, the individual's perceptions of the environment serve as the major determinants of behavior.[13]

The operant assumption in this broader approach to the meaning of educational environments holds that behavior in school is a function of the relationship between the individual and the school surroundings. In contrast to seeing educational environment in terms of its products, here the quality of the experience, including the nature of the learner's effort, is the central concern.

In short, just as the environment acts on the individual, the individual and the group are also acting to shape and reinforce the surroundings to create contexts for their own behavior. As stimulus-seekers, humans choose and anticipate which features of the environment to respond to, and thus contribute to the settings which determine their actions. Educational environments are created by ourselves and others, and thus can be changed. For this reason alone, the relationship of an individual or group with the environment are a productive topic of study. For example, the learners or teachers on the margins of a school, who experience their school surroundings and activities as blocking or refuting their attempts to learn or teach, are a key data

source for understanding ways that the environment might be changed. In sum, an educational environment consists of external conditions, process and forces which interact with an individual's perceptual sytem, purposes and personal history to create ongoing experiences for that individual.

However, not all of the school's environment is considered curriculum. Rather, we reserve the term "curriculum" for both external and perceived conditions that have been deliberately shaped to create a context for learning. Freud's dictum, "where id is, let ego be," urged his patients to seize hold of the impulsive, contradictory and irrational mix of pressures ruling their lives. In an analogous way, we urge "where unexamined environment is, let curriculum be" to suggest that curriculum is the conditions for learning that result from the participative process of constructing and reconstructing the school milieu.

When we nudge this general definition of curriculum a bit more into practical school settings, we find that curriculum conditions are characterized by three interrelated dimensions: the expressed, the implied and the emergent.

The Expressed Dimension

This dimension of curriculum is a written statement expressed in terms of intended learning objectives, learning opportunities, a sequence of content and evaluation procedures. The expressed dimension is the course of study or the syllabus, an acknowledged plan stating what is to be learned and describing how to teach and evaluate.

The Implied Dimension

This dimension of curriculum consists of implied messages received by learners from the physical, social and intellectual environment of the school. Similar to what is known as the hidden circulum, this dimension includes the unstated and unplanned hints given off by the rules and traditions embedded as regularities in the ongoing way of life in a school and its classrooms. Also, the implied dimension refers to unintended learning that results because of what is included or omitted in the content that is taught. The conditions of the implied are further spelled out in those actions of students and adults which are only rarely verbalized or explained. The implied dimension is critical because the learners' perceptions of the conditions that make up the habitat of the school and classroom result in a personal view that influences either positive or negative learning.

The Emergent Dimension

This dimension of curriculum includes the ongoing alterations, adjustments and additions that are made in the expressed and implied curriculum in order to insure harmony between the uniqueness of the individual learner and the character of the curriculum. The emergent serves as a corrective measure to smooth out and put the expressed and implied parts of the curriculum in line with each other and with learners. In other words, the emergent dimension intervenes when there are excessive gaps between learners and the curriculum.

Deliberately constructed environments for learning, then, take into account three related dimensions of curriculum.[14] While the expressed curriculum is traditionally the most prominent, in the

present definition it is primarily the initial dimension or starting point. Immediately, its implications are felt and its purposes subtly altered. Then, the emergent dimension takes precedence, calling for teacher decisions that correct the disconnection between expressed and implied curriculum or between the curriculum and the perceptions of the learner.

In short, our definition of curriculum as environments for learning shifts research and evaluation efforts to improve curriculum away from the one-dimensional, input-environment-output way of thinking and opens a multi-dimensional perspective on school practice. From this perspective, a set of premises can now be advanced to assist in the formulation of future priorities for curriculum improvement.

PREMISES

1. The social system of the school discourages change and innovation in order to maintain the prevailing nature of the institution.

2. Teacher interactions with learners are influenced by unnecessary regularities—routine or habitual ways of organizing and conducting classroom activities—that are seldom identified, discussed or changed.

3. Monolithic school environments tend to force to the margins especially those students who differ from the majority student population, thereby perpetuating discriminatory inequities based on race, sex, and social class background.

4. Teachers and students who are forced to the margins of school life can provide important information about how to improve curriculum because they experience on a daily basis the environmental constraints that refute their efforts to teach or learn.

5. Cooperation and collaboration between parents and teachers affects the attitudes of pupils toward learning and are important factors in improving educational environments in both the home and school.

6. The principal within the single school, is a key leader for initiating and facilitating efforts to change curriculum and improve learning environments.

7. Classroom teachers ultimately decide the ways in which curriculum improvements are put into practice because they are closest to the problems and progress of curriculum implementation and are in the best position to create remedies for perceived deficiencies.

A premise, as considered above, is a preliminary assertion about the practical nature of school environments that, if accepted, leads to further judgments about appropriate action by educators. A premise serves as a mainspring for one or more priorities. A priority is a description of urgent future action that should be taken by specific individuals or groups in order to bring about the improvement implied in the complementing premise. Clearly, not all premises implied by a wider meaning of educational environment can be included here. Instead, we have selected pertinent premises related to preparing the school environment for improvement by making it more responsive to the perceptions and needs of students and teachers on its margins. Similarly, not all priorities flowing from each premise will be suggested. Rather, priorities related to curriculum inquiry, policy, planning, and implementation are emphasized. These premises and priorities together establish one possible framework for curriculum research and practice in the next decade.

PREMISES AND PRIORITIES

Each premise about the practical conditions in learning environments is now listed and explained. A modest set of priorities is then suggested. The priorities are general enough so that they are

sensitive to the context of a particular school, school system, or educational agency yet specific enough so that they point clear directions for possible action.

Premise 1 — The social system of the school discourages change and innovation in order to maintain the prevailing nature of the institution.

Each school refines through the years an elaborate, precariously balanced set of norms and expectations that are considered to be necessary for the life of the institution. To maintain order and a sense of purpose, the institution establisnes limits to the behavior of participants, and uses deviant or atypical behavior as an opportunity for publicizing and reinforcing its rules. The "system" of tradition and procedures is frequently perceived by participants in a way that obscures, many times unwhittingly, the range of possibilities that are actually available. For example, the tendency to anticipate trouble from the system is characteristic of many principals and is used to prevent teachers from trying what is considered to be an unusual approach. Working in such settings can gradually lead to acceptance of the limits, an act of compliance limiting the ability to imagine feasible alternatives to the status quo. Perhaps this socialization tendency of schools is one reason a recent Rand Corporation report examining a sample of 293 local projects supporting educational change concluded that the longer a teacher had taught the less likely was the project to achieve its goals, and the less likely was the project to improve student performance.[15]

Social environments are self-regulating in a way that inhibits change. Socialized through years of coping within schools, educators

can grow gradually less capable of defining problems as results of familiar organizational processes. Instead, problematic situations are viewed as someone's fault. Rather than thoroughly analyzing the contenxt in which a problem occurs, educators are too often content with inquiry processes that shut down once a scapegoat is found. When this type of constrained analysis reigns, decision-making is governed by efforts to avoid personal conflict. Simply put, problem solving comes to a standstill because no one wants to become the scapegoat. In such immobilized environments, conflict is seen as the only avenue to curriculum change, and conflict avoidance with its indifference and lack of commitment becomes a realistic way of life for many administrators and teachers.

The following five priorities chart a future course for creating school settings more responsive to curriculum reconstruction.

- Educators and legislators at the Federal level should develop policy that deemphasizes perfecting educational products and stresses a concern for creating a capacity for change within school districts and single schools.

- State departments of education should cease placing requirements on schools, such as over-restrictive guidelines for the distribution of resources or criteria for minimum competency tests. Rather, state departments should serve as an instrument to enhance the capacity of the school to improve curriculum. One responsibility of the state department of education would be the collection and dissemination of information about the academic progress of learners in school districts and single schools. This information would be provided at the request of the local education agency to assist in curriculum decision-making.

- Curriculum scholars should conduct reserach that identifies conditions within school systems, schools and classrooms that have a positive or negative effect on the successful development, implementation, and continuation of desired curriculum programs.

- Characteristics of the school environment that are already having a positive effect on learning should be used by school staffs as starting points for expanding curriculum effectiveness. The thought here is that by starting with a positive base, it is more likely that plans for change will be successful.

- School staffs should identify and name the conditions in the school setting that hinder their effectiveness as teachers and administrators. Elimination of these conditions can help to make the school setting more supporting for the accomplishment of priorities for curriculum change.

Premise 2 — Teacher interactions with learners are influenced by unnecessary regularities--routine or habitual procedures for organizing and conducting classroom activities—that are seldom identified, discussed or changed.

If an audit of classroom practices could be conducted that asked (in zero-based budget language) for a thorough justification of each practice, the auditor might well uncover a myriad of questionable activities. For example, the relation between teachers and pupils is characteristically one in which pupils ask very few questions but give many answers. Would this practice stand up to a tough auditor's informed questions about cognitive development? Furthermore, between the ages of six and eighteen, for up to an hour every school day, most students are expected to learn to use numbers. Could a regularity with this heavy time investment expect to receive an equal budget allocation after questions were raised about the optimum developmental periods for teaching mathematics in a concentrated form? Should primary school boys and girls live up on opposite sides of the room? Should large groups of divergent individuals be expected to master a fairly rigid amount of subject matter in the same period of time? If our fictional auditor decided "no" to these and other such questions,

awareness of the instructional regularities that pervade the school day would increase.

Critical awareness of the routine, habit-forming quality of organizational behavior, particularly within bureaucracies, is necessary before lasting improvements are possible in these institutions. As Dewey notes, habits can be defined in terms of characteristic interactions between a person and an environment, and growth and learning are closely related to the continual formation, practice, interruption, and reorganization of habitual behavior.[16] Any attempt to introduce a change into the school faces some existing regularity—behavioral or programmatic. The overt regularities that can be seen in the classroom reflect covert principles and theories held by teachers and students about their roles in school. Teachers and students need to become more like auditors, because by surfacing the covert assumptions supporting unnecessary regularities, they challenge and revise habitual and comfortable roles that no longer stimulate learning.

To move beyond unquestioned assumptions and predictable classroom patterns, the following four priorities are advanced for curriculum development and implementation.

- Teachers should hold scheduled dialogues with their colleagues to raise to a conscious level the identification of proper and improper curriculum regularities in the school that guide their behavior when they interact with students.

- Teachers and staff development planners should analyze the habitual character of relationships among students and teachers in school, and conduct inservice activities that help teachers and administrators develop more effective partnerships for curriculum change. Specifically, staff development can help educators understand

that better curriculum implies changed behavior for teachers and administrators—how they work with other educators, how they participate in school decisions, how they communicate with parents and how they facilitate learning with students.

- Schools of education should reestablish demonstration schools to show how to involve teachers in curriculum development and how to implement and sustain desired curriculum practices. The demonstration school would be a bridge for linking the talents and resources of the university to the public schools and vice versa.

- Researchers should shift the emphasis away from investigations that concentrate on the influence of single student variables on learning outcomes, toward research about understanding the complex environmental factors that foster learning in schools and classrooms.

Premise 3 — Monolithic school environments tend to force to the margins especially those students who differ from the majority student population, thereby perpetuating discriminatory inequities based on race and social class background.

The repeated failure of many school environments to connect in a productive way with minority and poor students is familiar, disquieting evidence of the need for constructing more responsive curriculum. In part, the minimum competencies movement had its initial impetus in the mounting public concern that poor and minority youth (as well as increasingly numbers of white middle-class students) were leaving high school with inadequate skills. At the same time, the complexity of the economy was reducing the number of unskilled jobs available and raising the educational standards necessary for entry to other level positions. Despite public concern, the competencies approach runs the risk of certifying the failure of these students, by emphasizing the development of tests whose results assign these students to remedial groups or other peripheral positions in the academic life of the

school. Monolithic school environments too often establish ability groupings that, once set, make vertical or lateral movement among groups difficult.

Before any program focusing on deficits can answer the academic and social needs of their target student population, a curriculum must be implemented to permit all students to share common learning experiences, and to insure selected individuals a special place in flexible, temporary groupings for remedial assistance and supplemental enrichment. The distinction, then, between labelled groups should diminish because all students have been approached with the ongoing attention necessary for matching learning environments to their academic and personal needs.

The following three priorities move the school closer to realizing a curriculum that responds to strengths and weaknesses of students without consigning them to groups that stigmatize.

- Researchers and practitioners should develop and demonstrate ways to use curriculum as a means for accomplishing racial and social class integration in schools. Criteria for grouping students should be developed to insure students are not consigned to segregated positions in desegregated schools. In this way attention can be given to spelling out the specific differences between school desegregation and school integration. It is here the issues of integration where curriculum reform will serve as an instrument for social change.

- Principals and teachers should work together to create multiple-environment-schools that consist of a variety of settings designed to match social and intellectual conditions to the learning styles of students. The multiple-environment-school would be built on the idea that all students have strengths and weaknesses, and the distinct yet interrelated settings exist to stretch the strengths and correct the weaknesses.

- Members of the business community and education policy makers at the federal level should join to make sure that young people and adults who do not have literacy skills are provided an opportunity for learning to read, write, and compute. The workplace would be used for reaching people who were previously alienated from schools and who did not learn basic competencies.

Premise 4 — Teachers and students who are forced to the margins of school life can provide important information about how to improve curriculum because they experience on a daily basis the environmental constraints that refute their efforts to teach or learn.

Individuals who disconnect where others thrive are typically viewed by the schools as "problem people," difficult students and teachers. Educators often flinch from open communication with these marginal people whose dissatisfactions, probing questions, and obvious discomfort challenge existing practices. Instead of exploring concerns of marginal people, school staffs respond to the challenge with well-meaning attempts to ease these individuals back into compliance with the organizational structures that drove them to the fringes in the first place. Although such practices may temporarily squelch the perceived disturbance, they also close off an opportunity to improve the school.

A shift in perspective is needed. The difficulties of marginal students and teachers arise in a major way from interaction between individuals and the school environment, and not from the person alone. Increased understanding of marginal situations provides information for decisions to adjust the curriculum and restore the interest and motivation of the disconnected person.

Educators can start to better connect schools and people by considering the following three priorities.

- Researchers should develop techniques and instruments for collecting and analyzing perceptions of students and teachers toward conditions in schools. Further, increased attention can be given to research studies designed to understand the links among environment, perception, and behavior in schools and classrooms.

- Teachers should identify students who are alienated by the school, and determine their perceptions about specific conditions in schools and classrooms that force them to the margins. This information can be used to make decisions about the development of new curriculum and the alteration of existing curriculum so that the connection between students and schools can be restored.

- Researchers and practitioners should work to reconceptualize the meaning of curriculum so that it reflects the practical reality teachers and students face in the process of instruction and learning.

Premise 5 — Cooperation and collaboration between parents and teachers affects the attitudes of pupils toward learning and are important factors improving educational environments in both the home and school.

Despite a keen awareness of the influence of home environments, educators have not fully explored means by which parents and teachers can support each other in their efforts to provide quality learning experiences. We recognize that when the home and school environment are appropriately combined and supportive, learning is likely to be most powerful. We also believe that when the two settings are in conflict or out of sync, contradictory messages are likely to be received by learners, and what is learned in one place is stifled or unlearned in another. Continuation of a lack of harmony between the home and school can no longer be explained away. We must now do more to make it possible for the parent and the teacher to influence the conditions existing in both places.

Parents and teachers rarely have direct knowledge of conditions in each other's domain. What they do learn is selectively reported by a sometimes uneasy intermediary (the principal, the student) or communicated at stressful moments of crisis. Other opportunities for

dialogue can be created. Even when there are differences in perceptions among parents and teachers, the interface should be used as a sign to begin careful and sensitive collection of further information about the learners. The interface can also serve as a warning system for altering the habitat of the home, the school, or both.

To encourage collaborative and cooperative action, two priorities are suggested for consideration.

- Parents and teachers should work to establish procedures to share information about the progress and setbacks students are having in their learning. Parents can inform teachers about how their children learn best, special interests, cognitive and affective strengths and deficiencies, attitudes toward learning and school, positive or negative changes in behavior at home, and so on. Teachers can provide parents with information about their child's academic and personal successes and failures at school, teacher and student plans for correcting deficiencies, behaviors parents can reinforce at home and so on. By sharing such information it is possible to better insure that home and school environments are appropriately combined to provide support for learning.

- Teachers and administrators should design and implement programs to inform parents of young children about practical steps they can take to build a physical, social, and intellectual home environment that is likely to encourage learning. Parents would receive assistance from the school system that would help them to understand stages of development of children, and to discover useful ways to assist students to solve academic and social problems.

Premise 6 — The principal, within the single school, is a key leader for initiating and facilitating efforts to change curriculum and improve learning environments.

The improvement of curriculum is difficult to achieve within structural constraints of the typical school. However, the principal is in a salient position to provide leadership that overcomes the constraints and fosters cooperation among the teachers. In other words, the leadership style of the principal can influence the ambience of the

school. Teachers look to the principal for support in their efforts to reform curriculum, they expect the principal to clear the way for improvement of the learning environment. The principal sets the tone, and it can be said that so goes the principal so goes the school.

The position of the principal in the school setting provides opportunities and responsibilities for initiating improvement in several ways. First, as the primary spokesperson to the surrounding community, the principal can place curriculum concerns on the public agenda. Second, as chief link to the central office, the principal is able to establish and maintain channels of communication between the school staff and members of the larger system. In this role, the principal brings clarity both to policy and school needs. Also, within the school setting it is the principal who has the total perspective of curriculum concerns which are common to all teachers and classrooms and which are special to a particular group or individual. This panoramic scene helps the principal to garner resources of the entire school community and bring them to bear on the development and implementation of plans to improve the learning environment. The leadership of the principal in this action situation and its impact on faculty morale and performance is crucial. Finally, once the process of curriculum change has begun, the principal is in a unique position for initiating staff-development programs that are sensitive to emerging needs of the teachers rather than making use of "canned" programs that may not be appropriate for the immediate situation.

Changes in curriculum are an important part of the improvement of learning environments. Principals are the gatekeepers for action,

but they alone cannot bring about curriculum development and implementation. Without their leadership, however, curriculum change and the resulting improvement of learning environment is simply not likely to happen.

Four priorities that consider policies and plans within the single school are suggested.

- Central office administrators should establish policy for developing and implementing curriculum on an individual school basis. The intention would be for curriculum to be improved school by school according to the character of each setting. The school as a unit for change would be a starting point.

- Principals should develop plans for curriculum improvement that emphasize collaboration among the participants of the school rather than outside intervention as the stimulus and guide to change.

- Curriculum improvement plans developed by principals should take on a problem solving approach that identifies local school needs and then seeks solutions by involving the school staff. Such internal plans and procedures insure that curriculum improvement efforts do not simply make teachers aware of new curriculum products, packaged to appear as convenient, "hot" answers to problems that have not yet been identified, examined and understood.

- Principals should arrange for inservice staff development programs that enable teachers to grapple with problems that emerge as they go about the process of curriculum change. Too often staff development programs either treat issues before they are recognized as problems or stress issues that are not problems in the practical setting of the school.

Premise 7 — Classroom teachers ultimately decide the ways in which curriculum improvements are put into practice because they are closest to the problems and progress of curriculum implementation and are in the best position to create remedies for perceived deficiencies.

Changes in curriculum are an important part of any strategy for school improvement. Yet, curriculum programs prepared by experts who

are outside the ongoing life of the school often lack the backing of teachers and seldom produce the desired changes originally anticipated. Experience shows us that unless teachers support the new curriculum it will be no more effective than that which previously existed.

Curriculum does not take hold if it is packaged and imposed on teachers. Rather, effective implementation demands teacher involvement in decision-making. The decisions are based on close observations and careful analyses of students. It is this primary source of data that gives direction to curriculum implementation and improvement within the school.

The external experts who prepare and package curriculum frequently do define objectives and often make use of learning specialists who are familiar with human growth and development. Their good intentions, however, cannot translate to a school if the staff has not gone through their own internal process of determining what is important for the students they serve. If a driver is indifferent about safety and the way a car operates, the purchase of a newer car will not produce a better driver.

The curriculum must be more than the acquisition of a sequenced set of objectives stated in behavioral terms. There are many schools with marvelously elaborate syllabi. Yet, pages and pages of stenciled print do not a curriculum make. Teachers concerned about purposes and conditions for learning make a curriculum something other than a series of static exercises that are only occasionally meaningful for the students involved.

Procedures for implementing curriculum need to respond to the dynamics of the classroom and to be flexible enough to incorporate experiences, weaknesses and talents the students bring to the learning environment. Often it is difficult to judge when curriculum change is straying too far from the practical. It is at this key point that teachers are a must; they use their decision-making abilities to alter preconceived structures and to incorporate ideas that emerge as the curriculum starts to mesh with the students.

The curriculum of a school, then, is greater than the sum of its parts. It is an entity that has a personality of its own. Ignoring this factor is a major reason why curriculum programs implemented from without often fail. Laying a curriculum developed by outsiders onto a school environment is rather like taking another individual's personality and trying to live by this vision. It is most difficult to experience a commitment to a personality or curriculum not your own.

Five priorities for effective implementation of curriculum are suggested:

- Researchers and teachers should create and use methodologies to identify conditions in the school environment that foster or hinder teacher effectiveness in implementing curriculum. Then, by giving names to the conditions, it is possible to maintain surroundings that are positive and eliminate confines that are counter productive.

- Teachers and principals should insure that evaluation of teacher effectiveness includes how well teachers implement curriculum, including their ability to make desirable alterations in the expressed curriculum so that the school and classroom conditions better connect with the academic and social strengths and weaknesses of learners.

- Teachers and the principal should establish and use procedures for reporting the difficulties they encountered when implementing a curriculum. These reports about barriers would serve as information for mutual decisions to alter the

implementation strategies or adjust the nature of the curriculum. Also, the successes they experience should be acknowledged so that conditions that foster implementation can be noted.

- Teachers should call for decreased use of pre-packaged instructional materials (particularly those produced by publishing companies) and increased use of teacher-made materials specifically designed for their students so that a sense of ownership of the curriculum is established.

- Researchers and practitioners should develop and use computer-based record systems that provide teachers with easy access to information about cognitive and affective entry behaviors of learners, including competency levels and learning styles.

The priorities presented above are not intended to be seen as curriculum programs or as movements for reforming the curriculum. The priorities about inquiry, policy, planning and implementation are necessary for yet preliminary to programs or reform movements. Priorities serve as modest suggestions for future actions that secure an inner strength for a school. We believe that schools must reestablish their capacity for decision-making and program development so that the possibility for successful curriculum improvement is increased. The priorities advanced here are intended to develop a capacity for staffs in schools to determine and act on what needs to be done for linking the educational environment with students and teachers, even with those who are now on the margins.

CLOSING

By suggesting redirection for curriculum research and practice, we do not overlook the periodic tendency of curriculum priorities, which resurface in modified form to enrich and challenge prevailing modes of curriculum thought. We recognize the incremental ethos of

curriculum change as well as the recurrent patterns of curriculum thought. Our emphasis is not on detailing a sweeping new image of the school. Rather, we suggest actions that prepare school environments to enable programs planned by school personnel to succeed. We do not call for the school to produce some new outcome or to take on an added responsibility. Instead, we look to the quality of the engagement between person and curriculum as the starting point for ongoing improvement.

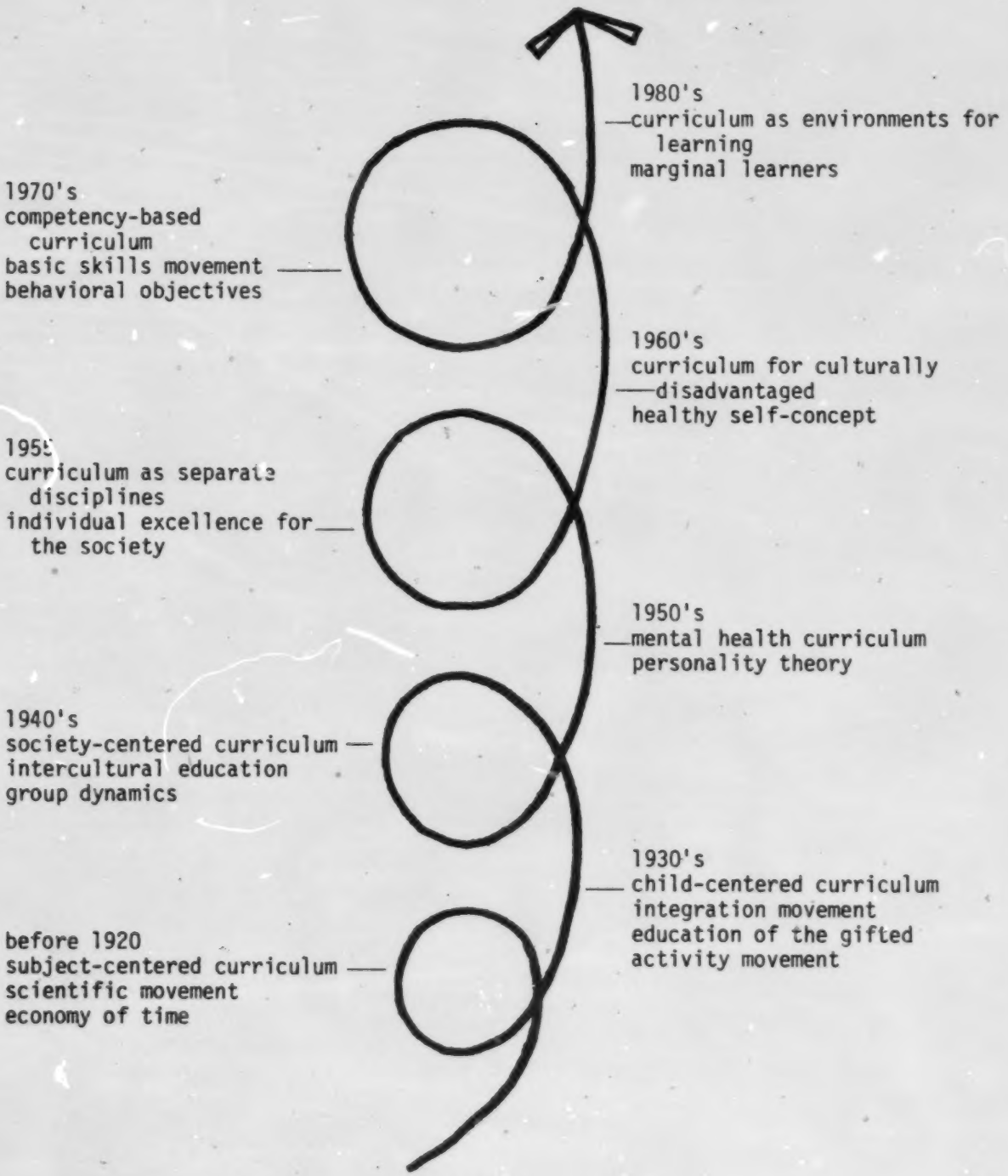
We are seeking to discern an emerging pattern of thought and action at the end of an era that has emphasized reductionist, input-output oriented curriculum. Extending Alice Miel's spiral model of twentieth-century curriculum thought up to the 1980's, Figure 1 graphically summarizes historic, recent and future curriculum trends.[15]

In brief, previous periods of emphasis on societal expectations and the structure of the subject matter (that seem to have presaged the 1970's concern for competencies and behavioral objectives) were followed by eras that incorporated the more wholistic, person-centered tone of our environmentalist approach. Further, the antecedents of our interest in marginal individuals at school can be traced through the previous concern for the "disadvantaged" back to the child-centered curriculum focus. It is not our purpose at this ending point to detail all historic parallels. It is enough to call as we have for curriculum priorities that anticipate and influence the gathering impetus that will take us beyond minimum competencies and basic skills.

Concern will continue to mount over the performance of students. However, it is now time to give accordant attention to the school reality that hinders desired improvement or fosters desired results. We suggest

Figure 1

Patterns of Curriculum Thought



that the momentum for future curriculum changes will come from inside the schools, particularly from the margins. Views from this perspective reveal a landscape with better schools and increased learning. The design and construction of this landscape will give direction to curriculum research and practice in the 1980's—an era of curriculum as environments for learning.

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